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*The conflict after the Pazzi conspiracy and Poliziano's 'Coniurationis commentarium':  
Literature, Law and Politics*

'I know, and God is my witness, that I have committed no offence against the pope except the fact that I am alive, that I have not allowed myself to be murdered, and that God's grace protected me; this is my sin, this is my crime, for this one reason I have earned banishment and excommunication [...] On our side we have canon law, on our side we have natural and political law, on our side we have truth and innocence, on our side God and men stand.'<sup>1</sup>

With these emblematic words Lorenzo de' Medici, in a famous letter to René of Anjou, dated 19th June 1478, defended himself against Sixtus IV's accusations which arose after the failure of the Pazzi conspiracy and against the excommunication and the threat of the interdict against Florence.<sup>2</sup> As is well known, after the attack against the Medici brothers which took place in the Cathedral of Florence on the 26th April 1478, when Giuliano was murdered and Lorenzo managed to save himself, an even more violent conflict arose between Florence and the actual instigators of the plot, mainly the pope and the king of Naples Ferdinando of Aragon: a conflict fought not just militarily through the war which lasted until the middle of 1480, but also through the multiple vehicles of political propaganda, which spread out into juridical, diplomatic, doctrinal, literary and artistic channels, all intersecting with each other.<sup>3</sup> The significant passage in Lorenzo's letter encapsulates some of the key elements on which the Medici defence rested. On the one hand, the rhetorical power of words, exemplified by the manifold pieces of Florentine cultural politics produced in those days (and also by Lorenzo's own words) and mostly disseminated through the new art of printing, which revealed for the first time all its political potentialities; on the other hand, the juridical force deriving from law (the 'canonicae leges' and the 'ius naturale et politicum' in Lorenzo's letter), which was able to bestow legitimacy on political actions. Thus the Pazzi conspiracy turns out to be an emblematic example of the fruitful interplay between law and literature. It is through the conflation of these different cultural tools - literary, diplomatic and legal - that the Medici succeeded in putting together an all-embracing system of propaganda aimed at justifying them from both a religious and political perspective (both 'Deus' and 'homines'

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<sup>1</sup> The letter is published in Rubinstein 1977: 72-74 (my translation): 'Ego enim mihi sum conscius, Deus autem testis adest, nihil me commisisse contra Pontificem nisi quod vivam, quod me interfici non sim passus, quod omnipotentis Dei gratia me protegit; hoc meum est peccatum, hoc scelus, ob hoc unum exterminari excommunicarique sum meritus. [...] Nobiscum faciunt canonicae leges, nobiscum ius naturale et politicum, nobiscum veritas et innocentia, nobiscum Deus atque homines sunt [...]' (p. 73).

<sup>2</sup> He had already sent a letter to René d'Angious on the 3rd May 1478 narrating the events of the conspiracy, so Lorenzo's letter dated 19th is almost certainly the reply to René's epistle; we know that René also sent his condolences to the *Signoria* and offered his help to Florence through his emissary, Gentile of Aversa: see Rubinstein 1977: 72.

<sup>3</sup> On the Pazzi conspiracy and the historical circumstances that led to the plot see Fubini 1994: 87-106, 253-327; Martines 2005; Simonetta 2008; Daniels 2013: 9-21.

supported them, according to Lorenzo's letter), a system based on the dissemination of the 'official' version of the events which corresponded to the historical *veritas*. This article is devoted to investigate this close interaction of literary and juridical means in this delicate historical phase: an analysis that has never been comprehensively conducted so far and can allow us to gain a better understanding, on the one hand, of the implications of the literary output produced in that period, on the other, of the complex connection that may link the fields of law and literature in specific historical contexts.

One of the central pillars of this well-articulated construction was the literary work composed by one of the most distinguished Florentine humanists, Poliziano's *Coniurationis commentarium*, written immediately after the plot (the *terminus post quem* is 23rd May 1478) and published in its first version in Florence by Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna, probably in late summer 1478;<sup>4</sup> while the second redaction of the work was published in two editions (one a copy of the other) in Rome in 1480 by Johannes Bulle.<sup>5</sup> This fundamental piece of historiography represents the first source of the events of the conspiracy, but it is also a sophisticated literary transposition of the episode, written by a refined humanist and a leading figure in the Medicean intellectual environment, very close to Lorenzo, to the extent that in those years he worked as Lorenzo's secretary. His reputation was already renowned throughout Italy, so that his *Commentarium* could stand out as the most authoritative historical account of the plot.

Since Poliziano's work was at the core of Medici cultural politics after the conspiracy, it also displays important relations, either directly or more indirectly, with the other fundamental components of this multi-pronged propagandistic output, in particular documents and texts which did not belong strictly to the sphere of literature, but also to the juridical, doctrinal and diplomatic domains. It is no coincidence that Poliziano's work was published in Florence by the same typographer who printed all the main works which built the Medici's programme in the summer 1478, all composed by intellectuals who acted as right-hand men of Lorenzo in that period: Bartolomeo Scala's *Excusatio Florentinorum*, an official document written by the chancellor of Florence and printed on 11th August 1478; and, most importantly, the *Florentina Synodus* by Gentile Becchi, archbishop of Arezzo and former tutor of Lorenzo, which was supposed to disseminate the results of a holy synod that actually never took place and was published later, probably in September (or, in any case, not before the 24 August).<sup>6</sup> Both texts were aimed at presenting the Medici's standpoint and defending Lorenzo and his political entourage from the

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<sup>4</sup> The most recent edition of Poliziano's work, with a critical introduction, is Celati 2015. On the date of composition and publication see also Perosa 1958: VI-VII; and Celati 2013.

<sup>5</sup> On the publication of the second version of the *Commentarium* see Celati 2016.

<sup>6</sup> The *Florentina Synodus* is now published in Simonetta 2012; and Daniels 2013. On the new hypothesis regarding the date of publication see Daniels 2013: 61-62. The *Excusatio Florentinorum* is published in Brown 1997: 199-202.

accusations made by pope Sixtus IV. In June Sixtus IV promulgated three virulent bulls, the first of which to excommunicate Lorenzo (1st June) and the other two to sanction the city with an interdict (22nd June),<sup>7</sup> with the main purpose of definitively defeating the ruler of Florence and punishing him for the revenge that had been carried out against the plotters. The Medici reprisal had affected some religious figures: in particular, archbishop Francesco Salviati, brutally hanged after the failure of his attempt at occupying the Palace of the *Signoria* (immediately after the attack in *Santa Maria del Fiore*), and Cardinal Raffaele Sansoni Riario, son of a niece of the pope (Violante Riario), imprisoned by Lorenzo's men. Lorenzo already knew the pope's main allegations before the official promulgation of the bulls, as he wrote in a letter to Leonetto de' Rossi, emissary of the Medici bank in Lyon, on 1st June 1478, the day on which the first bull was proclaimed.<sup>8</sup> In order to defend himself, Lorenzo did not just enlist all his most loyal collaborators, but he also asked some of the most important Italian jurists (mainly in Tuscany, but also in other regions) to put together some official legal *consilia* to hinder the pope's severe measures against him and his city.<sup>9</sup>

Thanks to their incisiveness and concreteness, the *consilia* had proved also in the past to be an authoritative means for fighting political, ecclesiastical and, more generally, ideological controversies which involved juridical matters. On the occasion of the conflict between Florence and Rome, several legal experts were asked for advice, such as Lancelotto Decio, Bulgarino Bulgarini, Andrea Barbazza, Pier Filippo della Cornia, Antonio Cocchi Donati, but the four most important *responsa* were produced by Bartolomeo Sozzini, Francesco Accolti, Girolamo Torti, and the 'dottori fiorentini' respectively (these four texts were published in early printed editions of collections of juridical works and some exemplars are still extant today).<sup>10</sup> These legal documents are closely connected with Becchi's *Synodus*, as was predictable in light of the doctrinal and juridical nature of this text; however, they prove to be related also to Poliziano's *Commentarium*, which, in turn, has a deep relation with the *Synodus* too. A productive and close collaboration must have linked Poliziano and Gentile Becchi in those days when they were both directly involved in dealing with the jurists:<sup>11</sup> a cooperation that reveals the circularity of intentions and themes which links most Medicean texts in this delicate scenario. Poliziano's and Becchi's works are informed by the same propagandistic perspective and provide the same explanations for the most controversial issues concerning Salviati and Cardinal Sansoni Riario, on which, and this is no coincidence, the

<sup>7</sup> The bulls are now published in Daniels 2013: Sixtus IV, *Bulla 'Ineffabilis et Summi Patris providentia' de excommunicatione Laurentii de Medicis* [Roma, Bulle, post 1 June 1478]; Sixtus IV, *Bullae 'Ad apostolicae dignitatis auctoritatem' et 'Inter cetera quorum nos cura sollicitat' contra Laurentium de Medicis* [Roma, Bulle, post 22 June 1478]. On Johannes Bulle see Celati 2016.

<sup>8</sup> The letter is published in Rubinstein 1977: 31-38 (for the remarks on Sixtus IV's allegations, p. 36).

<sup>9</sup> On the *consilia* see in particular Spagnesi 1996; Pennington 1993; Bizzocchi 1987: 264-268; De Benedictis 2007; De Benedictis 2012.

<sup>10</sup> See Spagnesi 1996: 1237-1238; Bizzocchi 1987: 267.

<sup>11</sup> See in particular Simonetta 2012: 20. Poliziano also composed an ode to Becchi on Giuliano's death (published in Del Lungo 1867: 58). See also Perosa 1958: VII.

*consilia* also focus. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the two texts display also a few direct verbal connections: in particular, in the printed edition of the *Synodus*, Giuliano is described with the very same words ('Florentine iuventutis delitie'; 'the darling of the Florentine youth') used by Poliziano in his *Commentarium* ('delitias Florentinae iuventutis'), and not with the expression 'gaudium universe terre', which instead appeared in the manuscript version of the text amended by Becchi before the publication: a borrowing that may also help us date the layered composition of the *Synodus*, which was probably finished after the *Commentarium*.<sup>12</sup>

More generally, the political dimension that surrounds Poliziano's work is revealed by the pro-Medici ideological perspective that imbues the whole text.<sup>13</sup> The well-crafted framing of the political message of the *Commentarium* has to be considered in connection with the concrete activity in support of Florentine politics that Poliziano carried out alongside Lorenzo in the same period. This commitment is tangible proof that the humanist was perfectly aware of the delicate political situation and the complex diplomatic relationships that Florence was weaving after the conspiracy. Poliziano, in particular, wrote a number of diplomatic letters on behalf of Lorenzo between May and June 1478 and he also played an active role in the collection of the legal *consilia* put together by his patron, as we shall see.<sup>14</sup> But before directly focusing on the relations between the *Commentarium* and the *consilia*, we have to consider that Poliziano's work turns out to be influenced in some of its chief aspects also by the political standpoints testified by other important political and legal documents, which reflect some specific Medici strategies designed to boost defences against their enemies. From this angle of analysis it is fundamental to examine not only what is present in the *Commentarium* but also, more significantly, what is missing. In fact in Poliziano's work the events are not contextualised at all within the wider Italian political scenario, but instead the most important instigators of the conspiracy are totally left out of the narration: Ferdinando of Aragon, Federico da Montefeltro, and even Sixtus IV himself, who is never mentioned (although relevant intersections implicitly link the literary account with the legal documents concerning the dispute with the pope). The text opens with the presentation of the plotters as immoral men driven by their evil nature, a colourful description which is followed by the narration of the assault in the church and the attack on the Palace of the *Signoria* led by Salviati; symmetrically, the second half of the work contains the narrative of the vengeance triggered against the conspirators and finally ends with the eulogistic portrayal of Giuliano, the young man murdered. In this studied specular structure, the *Commentarium* does not even allude to the intricate background of the conspiracy, so that this narrative scheme has been often regarded as a proof of

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<sup>12</sup> On this variant see Daniels 2013: 62.

<sup>13</sup> On political perspective of the text see Celati 2015: 6-18.

<sup>14</sup> The letters are published in Rubinstein 1977: 9, 11, 31, 58, 75, 83, 101. See also Simonetta 2012: 36. For Poliziano's role in the collection of the *consilia* see *infra*.

the partiality of Poliziano's historiographical views. Nevertheless these considerable omissions mirror Lorenzo's intention to cover up the guilt of the major Italian political figures, especially as, initially in the first month after the attack, the direct responsibilities of these instigators in the plot had been obscured by the government of Florence itself, which at that stage was in a very unstable diplomatic situation requiring cautiousness and prudence with its enemies.<sup>15</sup>

This political approach is revealed by the most important document which reconstructs how the conspiracy was organised: the famous confession delivered on 4th May 1478 by Giovanni Battista Montesecco, a *condottiero* who worked for Sixtus IV and was involved in planning the plot.<sup>16</sup> Despite its importance, no allusion to this document is made in the *Commentarium*. Moreover, immediately after the failure of the attack the confession was concealed by the Florentine government itself until August, when it was finally published and included in the printed edition of Scala's *Excusatio Florentinorum*. What is most remarkable is that the document was published with substantial cuts aimed at eliminating all the references to Ferdinando of Aragon and Federico da Montefeltro. These considerable omissions were clearly intended to publicly downplay the culpability of these external enemies, concentrating instead on the pope's responsibilities which, by that stage, had become manifest. The purpose was not to exacerbate political tensions and to let diplomacy try to negotiate an agreement.<sup>17</sup> Notably, also another literary text about the conspiracy, the *Lamento in morte di Giuliano* – an anonymous poem in the vernacular printed on 9th October 1478 by the typography of S. Iacopo of Ripoli<sup>18</sup> – mentions the concealment of the names of the more illustrious organisers of the plot, although their identities were well known in Florence: 'Furonvi certi di maggiore stato,/ che per miglior non dico e nomi loro,/ ma di vil gesta ciascheduno è nato,/ sì che pensilo ogniun(o) chi sono costoro' (Flamini 1889: I, vv. 94-97).

Furthermore, already on 23rd May, the Florentine government proclaimed severe legal measures to punish the Pazzi, which are also described by Poliziano in the first version of his work, in a passage that followed the narration of the abuse of Iacopo Pazzi's dead body and opened with the reference to the popular songs and pamphlets against the Pazzi circulating in Florence:

Multa praeterea iocularia carmina in Iacobi Pactii contumeliam inque omnium coniuratorum detestationem passim per urbem a pueris cantitata, multi undique famosi libelli in eosdem conscripti. Bona eorum in publicum adducta factumque senatus consultum, nequis post eam diem eius nomen familiae usurparet, nequa usquam Pactiorum insignia remanerent, ne ve quis nostra in re publica affinitatem cum ipsis contraheret. Qui contra faceret eum contra rem publicam contraque senatus auctoritatem facere. (Celati 2015: 87)

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<sup>15</sup> This strategy is also recommended by the rulers of Milan, Florence's allies, in a letter to Lorenzo dated 9th May 1478, cfr. Rubinstein 1977: 22n.

<sup>16</sup> The confession is published in Capponi 1876: 547-558.

<sup>17</sup> On these omissions see Fubini 1994: 264-268; Martines 2005: 154-177.

<sup>18</sup> The text, which was edited by Bartolomeo Fonzio, another humanist of Lorenzo's entourage, is published in Flamini 1889: 318-330. For the date of publication see Rhodes 1988: 74. On the activity of the typography see Nesi 1903 and Conway (1999).

[Moreover many jocular songs against Iacopo Pazzi and the other conspirators were sung all around the city by boys and many famous pamphlets were written against the plotters. Their properties and belongings were confiscated and a public body was created for this purpose; after that day nobody could use the name of the Pazzi family anymore in our state; the exposition of any Pazzi emblem was forbidden; and nobody in our state was allowed to marry a member of this family. Whoever did not respect these measures acted against the state and the senate's authority.]<sup>19</sup>

These laws, included in the *Provvisione* promulgated by the *Gonfaloniere* and the *Priori*,<sup>20</sup> were aimed at taking revenge against the Medici's enemies and isolating them from the Florentine community, on which these measures certainly had a deep impact. Poliziano himself insists on the isolation of the Pazzi in the whole *Commentarium*, underlining, in contrast, the common people's closeness to the Medici. The *Provvisione*, in particular, declared that the use of the Pazzi surname was prohibited and all members of the family, who had not been executed, had to change their name and emblem, which was banished too, so that all its representations had to be cancelled or covered over. All defaulters would be proclaimed immediately 'rebels' and would become open to prosecution and liable to be killed by anyone. As mentioned by Poliziano, a further harsh law was the interdiction of marriages which forbade any Florentine citizen from marrying any member of the Pazzi family. All these measures (including the requisition of all the Pazzi's goods and properties)<sup>21</sup> were intended to carry out a sort of *damnatio memoriae* of the Medici's enemies and their public humiliation. This result was also achieved by means of the traditional practice of portraying the images of the culprits executed, on the walls of the main official buildings of the city. It was the most illustrious painter of the Laurentian circle, Sandro Botticelli, who received this commission and painted these frescoes, probably on the *Palazzo della Dogana* and the *Palazzo del Bargello*, although after the Medici fall in 1494 these representations were wiped out.<sup>22</sup> It is no coincidence that the violent execution of the conspirators is fully and thoroughly described by Poliziano in his *Commentarium*, whose narrative perspective reflects the Medici's political guidelines also from this point of view. Poliziano, indeed, focuses on blaming the internal enemies of the Florentine regime, the Pazzi, who were immediately presented at the opening of the text as hated by the rest of the city (Celati 2015: 46), and, alongside them, he mentions only a few external conspirators, in particular the archbishop Salviati. So the *Commentarium* completes the accusatory picture disseminated by Lorenzo through all these propagandistic texts: Poliziano's work is mainly oriented to the internal political context, while the *Synodus* and the *Excusatio* were focused on the allegations made by Sixtus IV in June, when he was publicly recognised as Florence's chief foreign enemy.

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<sup>19</sup> The translations of all passages quoted in this article are mine.

<sup>20</sup> On this document (State Archive of Florence, *Provvisioni, Registri*, 169, ff. 24-26) see Perosa 1958: 61; and Martines 2005: 137-141.

<sup>21</sup> On these measures see Martines 2005: 208-220.

<sup>22</sup> For these pictures see Edgerton 1985: 104-109; Martines 2005: 141.

However, if it is necessary to consider what is missing in Poliziano's historical account, it is also essential to analyse what the author decides to cut from his work in the process of revising it two years after its composition, when he edited the text stylistically and refined its political perspective. The slight but substantial amendments that the humanist introduced into his text appear as the reflection of the evolution undergone by Medici politics in 1480, testified by important legal and diplomatic documentation.<sup>23</sup> In particular, on the 13th March 1480, Florence and Naples signed a fundamental peace agreement, after Lorenzo de' Medici's famous journey to Naples to meet Ferdinando of Aragon. It was a delicate diplomatic mission that put an end to the war that was waged after the conspiracy; nevertheless, the terms of the agreement also included some harsh conditions for Florence and prescribed that the measures of punishment that had been promulgated against the Pazzi had to be revoked. This disposition was put into effect in 1480, with the release of the members of the Pazzi family who had been imprisoned in the jail in Volterra and the abrogation of the heavy ban on marriage against the Pazzi.<sup>24</sup> This political development had a deep influence on the second version of the *Commentarium*, where, for example, Poliziano cut the description of the measures promulgated with the *Provvisione* of the 23rd May 1478. This change combines with a number of amendments that go in the direction of limiting the blame assigned to the Pazzi and, simultaneously, indirectly emphasise the responsibility of the archbishop Salviati, against whom Poliziano wrote three caustic epigrams added to the final version of the work. The most significant amendment appears in the title, which in the first edition was *Pactianae coniurationis commentariolum*, while in the final redaction becomes *Coniurationis commentarium*.<sup>25</sup> The excision of the name of the Pazzi from the title has to be traced back to political needs which must have been so urgent for Poliziano that he opted for an unconventional title, which leaves unspecified the subject of the text, the 'conspiracy', devoid of any historical definition. Thus, after the peace agreement with Naples and the cancellations of the legal measures against the Pazzi, the humanist thought it inopportune to insist on the revenge against the Medici's enemies and to identify the conspiracy with the name of their family.

Moreover, the publication of the second version of the *Commentarium* in Rome also has some implications in this changed historical scenario. What is most striking is that the Roman editions of the *Commentarium* were printed by a typographer, Johannes Bulle, who had been personally engaged in publishing official documents by the papal Curia and, even more remarkably, had also published also Sixtus IV's bulls against Lorenzo and Florence in June 1478. This element leads us to believe that the publication of Poliziano's text was approved by Sixtus IV, or at least

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<sup>23</sup> More generally, on the second version of the *Commentarium* and its publication see Celati 2016.

<sup>24</sup> The text of the treaty is published in Rubinstein 1980: 377-389. On the agreement see Martines 2005: 198-199.

<sup>25</sup> For the variants in the final version of the text and the changes in the title (the elimination of the name of the Pazzi and the change of diminutive *commentariolum* into *commentarium*) see Celati 2016.



tolerated, especially if we consider that the work was printed by a typographer so close to the Curia. This publishing operation can be contextualised in the new peaceful diplomatic relationship between Lorenzo and the pope that was ratified by an embassy sent from Florence to the pope, in November 1480.<sup>26</sup> We should also take into account the fact that the pope's direct responsibility in the attack is never mentioned in the text and that, in the second version, the main blameworthy plotter becomes Salviati, who was already dead and, in the changed political context of 1480, could work as a perfect scapegoat: a portrayal that is perfectly fitting with the new conciliatory tendencies in Lorenzo's internal and foreign politics.

The circumstances were completely different when Poliziano composed the *Commentarium* in 1478. Nevertheless, already in the first version of the text particular negative emphasis was put on Salviati and his hideous behaviour and actions, although, at this stage, this specific approach was due to different reasons. This standpoint can be directly linked with the aim of supporting the Medici defence against the pope's allegations of having executed a member of the Church with no legitimacy and it is completely consistent with the legal *consilia* put together for Lorenzo. All jurists placed a particular focus on the accusation concerning the murder of Salviati, a charge that was refuted, from a purely legal perspective, by disproving the application of the principle of 'notoriety' of crime, which was crucial in this dispute and on which the pope founded his right to condemn Lorenzo avoiding a regular trial: some jurists, indeed, claimed that the facts reported by the pope were not evidently well known, since they took place in the Palace of the *Signori* and were not witnessed.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, besides these arguments, in the *consilia* and in all main texts of the pro-Medici propaganda, especially the *Commentarium*, the violent execution of Salviati and his men was justified by depicting the archbishop as an armed man actively involved in the brutal attack, so that his clerical status was not even recognisable. The other chief historical episode around which the *consilia* rotate was the second main accusation alleged by Sixtus IV regarding the imprisonment of cardinal Sansoni Riario, which was justified by Poliziano and the jurists as being carried out to protect the cardinal from the people's vicious revenge. Although the first papal bull against Lorenzo contained eleven accusations that also concerned previous episodes which had led to the conspiracy (in particular the hostility arising from the intricate political circumstances in both Città di Castello and Perugia, where the Magnifico had supported factions opposed to the pope), nevertheless, also in the pro-Medici texts that examine these charges, in particular the *Florentina Synodus* and the *consilia* by Sozzini and Accolti,<sup>28</sup> the key points remain the episodes that occurred

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<sup>26</sup> On this embassy cfr. Martines 2005: 200-201.

<sup>27</sup> It is Girolamo Torti who focuses more specifically on this rebuttal (Calderini 1582: 102). On the issues of 'notoriety' and 'due process of law' see Pennington 1993: 243-244, 247-248, 256; Spagnesi 1996: 1247-1252.

<sup>28</sup> For these *consilia* see Pennington 1993: 248-262. On these historical events see Fubini 1994: 253-326; Simonetta 2008: 83-87, 100-106.

during the attack, as in the *Commentarium*, where the author's outlook is exclusively oriented to the actual historical event of the plot.

Poliziano's closeness to the jurists' line does not just appear in some pivotal elements underlying the perspective in his text's reconstruction, as we shall see, but is also proved by his personal involvement in consulting the legal experts and collecting the *consilia*, and his direct and continuous collaboration with Gentile Becchi, as a letter from Becchi to Niccolò Michelozzi, Lorenzo's secretary, shows.<sup>29</sup> This letter also reveals that Poliziano, together with Becchi, was probably in touch with Antonio Ferrucci, a member of a Florentine family loyal to the Medici who was assigned various official roles in Florence from the 1430s onward, and between 1467 and 1479 was appointed many times as a member of the *Consulte* (the meetings called by the *Signoria* in order to gain authoritative advice on the most crucial issues for the state of Florence), and in particular he took part in the official discussions on the Pazzi conspiracy in the *Consulte* in June and July 1478.<sup>30</sup> However the most significant collaboration from a legal point of view was that between Poliziano and Bartolomeo Sozzini, the distinguished Sienese jurist who was appointed as professor of law at the Studio in Pisa in 1473, in a period when Lorenzo himself was personally committed to employing the most illustrious Italian jurists as members of the new university, revealing his awareness of the importance of legal matters and, consequently, of enlisting eminent *doctores*.<sup>31</sup> Poliziano probably worked on the *Commentarium* in the same period when Lorenzo commissioned the *consilium* from Sozzini and he collaborated with the jurist in revising and sending the *responsum* to his patron. Already on 19th July 1478 Sozzini wrote a letter to Lorenzo from Pistoia, claiming that in the next two days he would send him a draft of his juridical *responsum* about the interdict: «infra due dì mandarò quello intendo del facto dello interdicto» (Verde, 1973-2010: 302) a statement that reveals that he had already been appointed by Lorenzo well in advance before that date. On 14th August Sozzini was urged to send his *consilium* in three or four copies officially signed (and he was requested to ask his colleague Antonio Cocchi to do the same), because all these copies had to be dispatched to other states: 'A messer Bartholomeo Sozzini, che si li manda una copia del suo consiglio, perché lo soscriva, e faccine fare tre o quattro altre copie, e tutte le auscentichi con la suscriptione e suggello. Simile facci fare a messer Antonio Cocchi, perché s'anno a mandare in diversi paesi' (Verde, 1973-2010: 302). The final version of

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<sup>29</sup> In an intricate passage of his letter Becchi states: '...Però gittavo uno motto a Lorenzo con questo Pulizano volevo ch'a tempo gli porgesse il Malebra che comettesse a tre di chotesti doctori gli togliessino il pensare a queste occorrentie et veghiassino questa materia, che importerà vi dico assai poi l'averla presa o a uno modo o a un altro, etiam che si faccia quello medesimo che consigliasse Antonio Ferrucci': Simonetta 2012: 22 .

<sup>30</sup> On Antonio Ferrucci see Arrighi 1997.

<sup>31</sup> On Lorenzo's commitment to employing jurists see Spagensi 1994: 1236. In particular, on Bartolomeo Sozzini and his role at the *Studio Fiorentino* see Bargagli 2000: 56-74.

Sozzini's *consilium* was sent to Lorenzo only on 24th August with a letter by Poliziano,<sup>32</sup> which proves that the humanist was directly involved not just as an intermediary in collecting and sending the *consilium*, but also in supervising Sozzini's work and helping him in revising his text, which had to be finished as soon as possible, in a form as perfect as possible. Poliziano explicitly says that he did everything he could not to waste time and he also praised Sozzini's commitment and dedication in producing his *consilium*, revealing that he closely oversaw the jurist's activity: 'vi mando e' consigli di M. Bartholomeo Sozzini. Holli sollicitati à ogni hora, et trovati li scriptori: et elli ancora vi ha usata diligentia somma. Ma non si è potuto fare più presto' (Chiappelli 1929: 103). Sozzini himself accompanied his work with a letter for Lorenzo, mentioning that he followed Poliziano's guidelines also for the schedule of the dispatch: 'Rimando a Vostra Magnificencia due copie del Consiglio et la terza coruna che io hebbi di costà. Sono subscribe et sigillate come desideravi. Non sono correcte, perché apena si sono potute finire, che Agnolo vostro mandava el cavallaro, si che si correggino tucte a tre innanzi che si mandino altrove...' (Chiappelli 1929: 101). This epistolary correspondence demonstrates the active role that Poliziano played alongside one of the main jurists consulted by his patron, in the same period in which he was probably finishing his historical account of the conspiracy. This collaboration has to be regarded not just as an independent work on parallel fields, but as an actual sharing of information and arguments to be employed to build the very well-articulated architecture of Lorenzo's defence through different but intertwined strands: juridical, doctrinal, diplomatic, and literary.

As some scholars have pointed out, all *consilia* display a similar pattern and share the same arguments deployed to counteract the pope's allegations, although sometimes in a different order and at different lengths. This consistency in the pivotal reasoning of the legal defence, and the use of the same arguments in the reconstruction of what had to be seen as the official version of the events, suggests that the jurists were provided with a sort of outline with the main guidelines to be followed and points to make use of in order to formulate their legal *responsa*.<sup>33</sup> It is also likely that this common blueprint, which included both juridical and political aspects, was designed in collaboration with both Becchi and Poliziano: the latter had also been a witness of the attack in the church and therefore was one of the most authoritative voices to be heard. Moreover, Poliziano's interest in legal subjects was not occasional and merely driven by these specific historical circumstances; on the contrary, he was committed to juridical studies throughout his life, as his philological activity on the *Pandects*<sup>34</sup> and his lifelong friendship with Sozzini prove. In particular, Poliziano in 1492 wrote the oration with which the Sienese government celebrated the election of

<sup>32</sup> The letter is published in Chiappelli 1929: 103; see also Daniels 2013: 62; Simonetta 2012: 19.

<sup>33</sup> For this hypothesis see Spagnesi 1996: 1246; and Daniels 2013: 43.

<sup>34</sup> On Poliziano's studies on the *Pandects* see Buonamici 1863; and now Rao 2016; Viti 2016; Mussini 2018.

pope Alexander VI, the *Oratio pro oratoribus Senensium ad Alexandrum sextum pontificem maximum*, delivered by Sozzini himself, who on this occasion was the leader of an official diplomatic mission.<sup>35</sup> It is also important to consider that the legal experts themselves, in the delicate situation in the aftermath of the conspiracy, probably needed external support to match Lorenzo's requirements in writing their *consilia*, which are all based on the careful description of the historical events and appear as the results of the conflation of juridical observations, based on technical expertise, and political and rhetorical elements.

If the centrality of the historical account emerges in all *consilia*, the rhetorical nature of the legal formulation surfaces more openly especially in some sections of Sozzini's work, which reveals in this aspect, once more, the influence that Poliziano's supervision may have had on it. In particular Sozzini, unique among the *doctores* consulted, at the beginning of his juridical reasoning introduces a brief but significant eulogy of Lorenzo (immediately after having recalled his personal and professional commitment to Florence) and, in so doing, he implicitly underlines the rhetorical threads in his legal discourse:

Quis est tam ferreus tam durus ut non comoveatur cum videat dictum Laurentium, virum pium, religiosum, iustum et omnibus virtutibus ornatum atque excultum, ignominia affectum et verbis iniuriosis lacessitum. (Corti 1558: 27r)

[Who can be so harsh and inflexible that he is not moved by seeing Lorenzo, a devoted man, religious, fair and adorned and endowed with all virtues, hurt by ignominy and offended by insulting words.]

The fertile interplay between legal and rhetorical elements emerges in both this eulogistic introduction to Sozzini's *consilium* and in the famous passage in Lorenzo's letter to René of Anjou, quoted at the opening of this article, but with different proportions between the two components in each text: in particular, in the epistle it is the rhetorical ingredient that prevails over the legal allusions, although the reference to the support provided by the sphere of law is apparent in Lorenzo's proud and confident statement.

As already mentioned, the *doctores* consulted turn out to be very well informed on the historical events and paid particular attention to providing a convincing and authoritative narrative of specific episodes, in particular the assault in the Palace by archbishop Salviati and his subsequent execution. According to the pope's accusation, since Salviati was a religious man, the jurisdiction of his behaviour, and therefore of his punishment, had to be the exclusive prerogative of the Church, and not of a secular government like the Florentine state. However, according to the strategy of defence formulated in the *consilia*, the execution of Salviati is justified with the evidence

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<sup>35</sup> The text is in the *editio princeps* of Poliziano's *Opera omnia*, published in Venice, in 1498 (*Omnia opera Angeli Politiani et alia quaedam lectu digna quorum nomina in sequenti indice videre licet*, Venetiis, in aedibus Aldi Romani, mense Iulio M. IID. [anastatic reproduction: Roma, Bibliopola, 1968], f. aar-aiiir). On Poliziano's relationship with Sozzini see also Bargagli 2000: 154-157, 217.

that his religious status was not recognisable when he attacked the palace with his armed men, and therefore the city of Florence had the right to put into action exceptional measures of punishment against him, with the legitimate aim of self-defence. The legal experts dwell on the narration of Salviati's attempt at seizing the Palace of the *Signoria* and underline the fact that he was armed and not dressed in clerical garb, but in secular clothes, as both Accolti and Sozzini claim:

...archiepiscopus dum fuit captus et suspensus inventus est sine vestibus clericalibus et cum armis in palatio magnificorum dominorum, idest sine habitu clericali... Fuit inventus in palatio magnificorum dominorum cum vellet palatium capere cum manus in vexilliferum iusticie voluisse inicere et sic inventus est sine habitu cum armis inmiscens se enormibus sceleribus, idest turbationi status excitans seditionem. Ergo potuit occidi et suspendi sine pena excommunicationis. (Accolti 1482: *consilium* n. 165, r)<sup>36</sup>

[The archbishop was captured and hanged as he was found not wearing clerical clothes and armed in the Palace of the magnificent *Signori*, that is to say that he was without clerical garb... He was found in the Palace while he wanted to seize it with armed men and to kill the *gonfaloniere* of justice, and he was found without his clerical clothes and involved in a nefarious crime, the overturning of the state aimed at triggering an uprising. For this reason he was able to be killed and hanged without the threat of excommunication.]

...archiepiscopus Salviatus Pisanae civitatis, dimisso habitu, armatus scuto et ense, captus est in palatio dominorum, dum quaerebat palatium occupare, magistratus et cives primarios expellere et trucidare. Quo casu, qui in eum manus violentes iniecit, non...est excommunicatus... (Corti 1558: 31v)

[...the archbishop of Pisa, after taking off his clothes, armed with shield and sword, was captured in the Palace of the *Signori*, while trying to occupy the palace, and expel and slaughter the magistrates and the leading citizens. In this circumstance anyone who laid a hand on him violently...is not to be excommunicated...]

It is significant that Poliziano also devotes a substantial section of his historical account to the description of the archbishop's attempt to siege and occupy the Palazzo of the Signoria, providing a version of the episode that adheres to that offered by the jurists and implicitly supports their strategy in refuting papal allegations:

Interim Pisanus praesul Caesarem Petrucium, vexilliferum, quod aiunt, iustitiae, remotis arbitris, in colloquium vocat, eo consilio, ut hominem trucidet: velle se ait nonnulla Pontificis referre nomine. Quidam ex Perusinis proscriptis, qui hominem facinoris conscii in curiam comitabantur, in publici cubiculum scribae se coniciunt, uti locum idoneum teneant; fores concludunt cubiculi, neque eas, ubi res postulat, aperire queunt: ita neque sibi neque suis auxilio esse. At Caesar, ubi titubantem Salviatum contemplatur, dolum suspicatus, lictores ad arma concitat. Salviatus metu perturbatus e cubiculo se proripit. Ille in Iacobum Poggii filium incidit eumque, ut est homo ingentis animi, capillo correptum humi deturbat custodibusque servandum mandat; mox ad summam turrim cum dominorum manu festinus evadit. Ibi, quantum in se est, correpto e culina veru (nam id ei telum metus atque ira obtulerant), fores tuetur, suam atque publicam salutem acriter defensat. Idem alii pro se quisque viriliter agunt. Crebrae in Florentina curia sunt ianuae: eae a lictoribus occlusae, capita coniuratorum separant. Ita illi in multos diducti rivulos impetum perdunt. Interea omnis curia intus fremere, pauci ex civibus eo convenire. (Celati 2015: 56-58)

[Meanwhile, the Archbishop of Pisa called Cesare Petrucci, the Gonfaloniere of Justice, as he is called, into council, with the aim of killing him after removing any witness: he said that he had to report some things to him on behalf of the pope. Some exiled men from Perugia, who accompanied him into the palace and were aware of the crime, gathered in the Chancellor's room, so as to hold an advantageous position; they closed

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<sup>36</sup> In this early printed edition pages are not numbered and we have only the indication of quires (in this case: 'r'); this *consilium* is numbered as 165.

the room's doors, but they could not open them when the situation required it and, thus, they could not be of any help either to themselves or their fellow-attackers. But Cesare, as he looked at Salviati and realised that he was faltering, suspected the deceit and called the guards to arms. Salviati, scared to death, dragged himself out of the room; Petrucci came upon Iacopo di Poggio and, proving to be a very brave man, grabbed him by the hair, threw him to the ground and gave him to the guards to have him watched. Then he escaped to the top of the tower of the palace with a group of men. There, as best he could, grabbing a spit from the kitchen (fear and anger had provided him with that weapon) he guards the entrance, vigorously defends his life and public safety. The others acted in the same way, with the same vigour, as much as they could. The Palace has a large number of doors: since these were closed by the guards, the leaders of the conspirators found themselves separated. Thus, once divided into many rivulets, they lost their strength. In the meantime, the whole palace resonated with noises from inside, and some citizens gathered there.]

Moreover, also the *Florentina Synodus* and other texts produced as part of the Medici defence share the same perspective in recounting this crucial episode, and it is remarkable that even a more popular work, the *Lamento in morte di Giuliano*, which cannot be strictly seen as a product of the Laurentian entourage, narrates the attack led by Salviati emphasising the evil nature of the 'pazo' archbishop:

Messer Francesco arcivescovo pazo/ con forse trenta, come il ver si spande,/ quasi mostrando d'andare a sollazzo,/ coll'arme sotto, in piazza se n'andòe per pigliar de' Signori el gran palazo. (Flamini 1889: vv. 173-177)

As already observed, the negative focus placed on the figure of Salviati, who appears in Poliziano's narrative as the most blameworthy instigator and one of the main organisers of the conspiracy, is accentuated still more in the second version of the *Commentarium*, where the humanist also adds a brief sentence which underlines the archbishop's role as leader: 'Principes coniurationis post Salviatum, Iacobus et Franciscus Pactii' (Celati 2015: 48); 'After Salviati, the leaders of the conspiracy were Iacopo and Francesco Pazzi'. This specific culpability ascribed to Salviati emerges also in the *consilia* by Sozzini and Accolti, where he is considered guilty of organising Lorenzo's assassination and commissioning his killing, a crime that, according to Canon law, deprives the culprit of any honour and benefices and, therefore, of his clerical status, as Sozzini states (mentioning also the role played by Giovan Battista Montesecco, who was appointed to kill Lorenzo, but in the end refused to do it).<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, the jurists rejected Sixtus IV's accusation against Lorenzo of being responsible for the archbishop's hanging with a further specific rebuttal. They claimed that, after the attack in Santa Maria del Fiore, the Magnifico was wounded and sought refuge in the sacristy of the church and, after that, he was carried to the Medici Palace, where he remained until after Salviati's execution; thus he was not among those who hanged the archbishop and they did not follow his orders in doing so, but they just acted in defence of the fatherland. In particular, both Girolamo

<sup>37</sup> Corti 1558: 31v. See also Pennington 1993: 261.

Torti and Francesco Accolti emphasise Lorenzo's critical conditions after the attack so as to exonerate him from any accusation.<sup>38</sup> This version of the event, once more, matches Poliziano's narrative and finds legitimacy in it, since the *Commentarium* is the only source that provides a reliable description of Lorenzo's rescue in the sacristy and then in his palace, dwelling also on representing his heroic reaction in the days after the plot, when, still in his house, he was able to take care of the city and was enthusiastically celebrated by the Florentine people (Celati 2015: 62).

The second main point of Sixtus IV's accusatory scheme concerned the imprisonment of cardinal Raffaello Sansoni Riario, who was released only after the publication of the excommunication.<sup>39</sup> Florence's allies, Milan and Venice, had already advised Lorenzo to liberate him with their letters of 8th and 25th May 1478 respectively: the Milanese Dukes claimed that there was nothing to win from detaining the cardinal and that was more advantageous 'compiacere et gratificarsene col Papa' (Rubinstein 1977: 22n); while Venice suggested that Florence should 'acquietare l'animo de chi ha passion del cardinale' (Rubinstein 1977: 32).<sup>40</sup> Before being released, the Cardinal was escorted to the Convent of Annunziata on 7th June, where he was asked to write a letter to the pope confirming the truthfulness of the version of the events officially provided by Florence: this statement, which ultimately was inserted also in the *Synodus*, was a further element employed to support Lorenzo's defence in the *consilia* and in Becchi's work.<sup>41</sup> The detention of the cardinal was the key issue on which the conflict between Rome and Florence was fought in the first month after the conspiracy. Lorenzo's delay in freeing the hostage was due to the intention to maintain leverage in the dispute with the pope, since the Florentine merchants and the ambassador residing in Rome had been detained in the papal city after the plot.<sup>42</sup> Almost no source on the Florentine side mentions this reason for the detention of the cardinal; only the *consilia* by Sozzini and Torti add this motivation, which is seen as a confirmation of the legitimacy of Lorenzo's action. However, the main argument on which the defence is built is another. It is remarkable that the version of the events that was spread by Florence through all channels of Medici propaganda was framed immediately after the attack, since we find it in the letter sent by the *Signoria* to the Florentine ambassador in Rome, Donato Acciaiuoli, already on the 26th April, the very day of the attack. This letter, and subsequently all other texts, reports that the young man was taken into custody so as to protect him from the brutal revenge that the common people were carrying out in the streets of Florence, otherwise he would have been killed: in the official epistle it is claimed that

<sup>38</sup> See Pennington 1993: 252, 263.

<sup>39</sup> The decision to release the cardinal was taken on 4th June 1478, as stated in a letter from Lorenzo to Donato Acciaiuoli of the same day (cfr. Rubinstein 1977: 47); the bull that sanctioned the excommunication was promulgated on 1st June.

<sup>40</sup> These letters are in the State Archive of Milan, *Carteggio generale Visconteo-Sforzesco, Potenze Estere, Firenze*, 294; *L. Botta ai Duchi, Carteggio generale Visconteo-Sforzesco, Potenze Estere, Venezia*, 1063.

<sup>41</sup> See Daniels 2013: 70; 149-151; Simonetta 2012: 151.

<sup>42</sup> On this reaction in Rome after the failure of the plot see Bizzocchi 1987: 167-168; Rubinstein 1977: 31-32.

the main concern was that ‘in questi tumulti ...’l popolo non facesse qualche novità contro al Cardinale’ and, as a result, he was taken into the Palace ‘honoratamente tanto che l’ira del popolo si quieti’ (Rubinstein 1977: 13). This is the motivation that is explicitly adduced also in Poliziano’s work:

Interim Laurentiani curiam recipiunt [...] Cardinalem comprehensum magno praesidio in curiam subducunt aegreque hominem a populi impetu tuentur. Qui eum assectari consueverant, plerique a plebe occisi (Celati 2015: 58)

[In the meantime, Lorenzo’s supporters regained the Palace [...] They led the captive cardinal to the Palace with a large group of guards and defended him with much difficulty from the people’s violent attack. Most of those who were part of his entourage were killed by the common people.]

Significantly, we find the very same explanation in all legal *consilia*, where the historical reconstruction adheres to Poliziano’s account. Once more, it is Sozzini’s *responsum* which displays the most direct connection with the humanist’s version:

Domini Otto de Balia multis militibus stipati accesserunt ad Cardinalem et honorifice duxerunt ad palatium, quod quidem nisi factum fuisset, notorium est quod populus furens eum interemisset. Nam vix ipsum potuerunt in palatium recipere et a furore liberare... (Corti 1558: 32r)

[The Otto di Balia, with many soldiers, seized the Cardinal and led him to the palace treating him with great honour, because, if they had not done so, it is clear that the furious people would have killed him. In fact, they were barely able to rescue him into the palace and save him from the people’s fury...]

In particular both Poliziano and Sozzini focus on the people’s fury and allude to the fact that the young man was saved ‘with difficulty’ (‘aegre’; ‘vix’). It is noteworthy that in the *Synodus* similar emphasis is put on the people’s violence, but the credit for the rescue of the Cardinal is given directly to Lorenzo: ‘Solus Cardinalis opera Laurentii...a furore populi est liberatus’ (Daniels 2013: 110; ‘The cardinal only was saved from the people’s fury, thanks to Lorenzo’). Moreover, Poliziano mentions that most men of the Cardinal’s entourage were killed by plebs, as all jurists do in their works.<sup>43</sup> The legal experts justify this summary execution (as in the case of the archbishop’s hanging) blaming these curial members for taking part in the armed attempt at seizing the Palace and, therefore, seeing them as responsible for placing themselves outside a recognisable religious status.

The consistency and uniformity in the version disseminated by diplomatic, juridical and literary texts demonstrate how well-crafted and effective the all-embracing Florentine propagandistic machine was. A further less emphasised, but crucial, element that links all these works, and in particular Poliziano’s *Commentarium* and the *consilia*, is the political perspective underlying the defence of the Florentine reaction against both the conspirators and Sixtus IV’s accusatory construction. This was a dispute which rotated around the key political issues of the

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<sup>43</sup> On this brutal killing see Perosa 1958: 42.



*crimen laesae maiestatis*, the right to self-defence of a state, and the conduct of a prince in contrast with that of a tyrant.<sup>44</sup> The need to re-establish the violated boundaries of the autonomy of a state emerged as a crucial point in this controversy, which involved the limits of papal absolutism and the idea of legitimacy of government. In his bulls the pope blamed the Florentine ruler for not respecting and obeying papal authority, and therefore, for being the cause of conflicts and discord not just in Florence but also in Italy; consequently he depicted him as a tyrant, outside the law with his behaviour, and, in this view, the Florentines could save themselves from being accomplices of their leader only by banishing him. Thus, besides the purely legal rebuttals framed by the jurists within the field of the ecclesiastical privileges (in particular concerning the unrecognizable clerical status of the armed clergymen who attacked the Palace), a fundamental component of their refutation was directed at exculpating the Florentine government by affirming its right to defend the fatherland and all civic community. Again, this political standpoint emerges in both the *consilia* and Poliziano's work, where the whole ideological outlook surrounding the narrative conveys the image of Lorenzo as a legitimate and loved ruler, whose safety is seen as coinciding with the security of the whole fatherland.

The accusations that presented Lorenzo as a tyrant were mainly confronted in the epistle written by Bartolomeo Scala on behalf of the *Signoria*, on the 21st July 1478, as a reply to the *breve* promulgated by Sixtus IV on the 7th July, another important piece in this long-distance conflict;<sup>45</sup> but the jurists also had to take into consideration and reject this more political point. They focused on defending Lorenzo and Florence from the charge of having reacted too harshly against the conspirators and built this refutation by evoking the principle of the legitimacy of self-defence and protection of the state. From this point of view, the Florentine civic community was in clear danger, especially during the attempt to seize the Palace, thus Sixtus IV could not blame Lorenzo or the members of the Florentine institutions (the *Priori* and the *Otto di Balìa*) for their reaction. Consequently they were not blameworthy for the crime of *laesa maiestate* towards the pope either, because it was the whole Florentine people who acted in self-defence in response to the attackers, since the city was in an exceptional state of crisis and threat. This standpoint is put forward in the *consilia* by Accolti and Sozzini, and the latter in particular underlines the idea of protection of the public safety: '...cives primarii de salute patriae trepidabant...' (Corti 1558: 31v; 'The leading citizens were deeply concerned for the safety of the fatherland...'). But the centrality of these tenets is stressed with even more emphasis by Torti, who goes even further and significantly declares that in these exceptionally dangerous circumstances it was necessary to publicly and harshly execute

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<sup>44</sup> On these aspects of the dispute see in particular Spagnesi 1996: 1241-1242; De Benedictis 2007; and more generally on the opposition prince/tyrant see De Benedictis 2012.

<sup>45</sup> See Brown 1997: 195-198; Di Benedetto 1992: 376-378; Daniels 2013: 37-38; Rubinstein 1977: 131.

Salviati and his fellow-attackers with the highest degree of violence and cruelty, a ruthlessness that was regarded as the most effective warning for the other conspirators and future attackers:

Quia dico quod non solum fuit necesse ipsum [Salviati] interficere, sed etiam publice, et crudeliter maxime, ut coniuratis suis et extremo auxilio esset exemplo, ut ab inceptis desisterent, et sic...fuerit exemplo mortis acerbissimae... (Calderini 1582: 105)

[I claim that it was necessary not only to kill Salviati, but also to do so publicly and with the highest degree of cruelty, so that this could work as an example for his fellows-conspirators, who would give up the endeavour and, thus...this could be an example of a brutal death...]

Girolamo Torti, a famous jurist who worked at the University of Pavia, was explicitly praised by Lorenzo in a letter to Girolamo Morelli, the Florentine ambassador in Milan, written on 20th August 1478, which reveals the Magnifico's particular appreciation for this *consilium*, to the extent that he did not think it strictly necessary to ask for other experts' advice (as Morelli instead suggested): 'Parendovi da fare consigliare sopra alla bolla a qualche altro doctore, si rimette in voi; ma questo Torto è di più reputazione che alcuno altro sia costì' (Rubinstein 1977: 181-182).<sup>46</sup> The stress placed by Torti on Florence's right to react to the attack with exceptional violence and on the need to brutally punish the conspirators, in particular the archbishop, finds an unspoken but striking correspondence in Poliziano's *Commentarium*, where the author describes with vivid and gruesome images the hanging of Salviati, providing also a horrifying anecdote which is sketched in distinctly macabre taste (besides, the three epigrams added in the second version of the text are also mainly devoted to Salviati's death):

Mox et Pisanus praesul ex eadem, qua et Franciscus Pactius fenestra pendebat, supra ipsum exanimum corpus suspenditur. Cum deiceretur (id quod mirum quidem omnibus visum iri arbitror, nemini tamen ignotum eo tempore extiterit), sive id casus aliquis sive rabies dederit, ipsum illud Francisci cadaver dentibus invadit, alteramque eius mamillam, vel cum laqueo suffocatus est, apertis furialiter oculis, mordicus detinebat. (Celati 2015: 60)

[The archbishop of Pisa was hung from the same window as Francesco Pazzi, directly above the lifeless body itself. When the archbishop had been cut down (this episode will seem extraordinary to everyone, although it was unknown to none at the time), either by chance or anger he bit Francesco's corpse in the chest, and while he was strangled by the noose, he hung onto it with his teeth, with his eyes wide open in rage.]

Poliziano's ghoulish emphasis on the violence of the revenge against the plotters emerges in all sections of the narrative of the reprisal and it can be regarded as in accordance with the perspective informing the *consilia* and also as paralleled by the famous *pitture infamanti* of the conspirators' dead bodies depicted on the city's walls. What is most remarkable is that this reprisal is almost always portrayed by Poliziano as a vengeance carried out by the common people of Florence, who acted collectively in the historical account and are mainly seen as the personification

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<sup>46</sup> See also Spagnesi 1996: 1240.

of the civic community close to its leader. They are depicted as committed to supporting him and defeating his enemies, who coincide with the fatherland's enemies. This narrative angle is apparent in a number of passages in the text: for example in the lengthy description of the torture inflicted on Iacopo Pazzi's corpse, which was unearthed twice, dragged around the city and abused by a group of young boys, and finally thrown into the river Arno (Celati 2015: 66-68); in the image of the people who rushed up to the place where Antonio Volaterrano and Stefano da Bagnone, Lorenzo's attackers, were captured, and tortured and mutilated them, cutting their nose and ears off, before taking them to the gallows (Celati 2015: 64); and in the portrayal of the Florentine people who, in order to show their closeness to the Medici and support their revenge, carried their spears with pieces of corpses on the top around the city:

Omnia direpta, cadavera ipsa foede lacerata: iam ante Laurentii fores caput humanum lanceae praefixum, iam humeri partem attulerant (Celati 2015: 58)

[Everything was plundered, corpses were brutally torn apart: people carried along a human head or a piece of a shoulder on top of their spears and brought them in front of Lorenzo's door.]

This narrative approach underpins the political perspective which imbues both the *Commentarium* and the *consilia*, where the conspiracy is seen as an attack against the entire state and, consequently, the reprisal as the reaction of the whole Florentine people. It is no coincidence that the jurists do not even tell us who hanged Salviati and fought to defend the Palace, and leave this information undetermined. This detail is also unspecified in the *Commentarium*, where Poliziano uses a vague formula with the passive form 'Pisanus praesul...suspenditur' to describe the execution of Salviati (Celati 2015: 60) and employs the generic expression 'Lorenzo's men' for the people who reconquered the Palace: 'Interim Laurentiani curiam recipiunt' (Celati 2015: 53). Significantly, a general expression appears also in the *Synodus* in the narrative of the same episode: 'illi Palatii liberatores', 'those who reconquered the Palace' (Daniels 2013: 115).

Thus the legitimization of Lorenzo's right to react against the plotters as the right to protect the state is constructed through the interplay of both juridical and literary means, revealing how all elements deployed to hear off the pope's accusation interlock and work together in building the Medici programme of defence. If the *consilia* insist on affirming the right to self-defence of the homeland, presenting Lorenzo as a legitimate ruler and not a tyrant, the *Commentarium* is the piece of the Medici propaganda which makes the most considerable contribution in conveying this standpoint. This perspective is put forward through the representation of the mutual and unbreakable relationship between Lorenzo, the city of Florence and its people, to the extent that the Magnifico becomes the personification of the whole Florentine community, bordering on the image

of an actual *princeps*<sup>47</sup> and standing out as the leader and the saviour of Florence. The section of the text where this ideological perspective is framed most effectively is the description of the support provided by all citizens to their ruler after the attack, which intertwines with the portrayal of Lorenzo which is sketched with heroic traits:

Fremebant omnes ... ipsum Laurentium, in quem unum Florentina omnis res publica recumberet, ipsum illum Laurentium, in quo spes omnes opesque populi sitae forent, ferro petitem, id vero indignissimum clamitabant. Iam ex omnibus municipiis, ut quaeque urbi viciniore essent, magna vis armatorum in forum, in trivia, in Medicam praecipue domum confluere, ostentare pro se quisque suum studium; cives catervatim cum liberis et clientibus polliceri suam operam, suas vires atque opes; omnes ex uno Laurentio et publicam et privatam pendere ipsorum salutem dictitare. [...] Ipse Laurentius non vulnere, non metu, non dolore, quem ex fratris nece maximum ceperat, impediri quo minus rebus suis prospiceret: prehensare cives omnis, [...] ipsis omnibus suam dicere salutem referre acceptam; populo sese de ipsius salute anxio non nunquam e fenestris ostentare. Ibi acclamare omnis populus, manus ad caelum tollere, gratari eius saluti, exultare gaudio. (Celati 2015: 60-62)

[Everyone complained that...the conspirators had even sought to kill Lorenzo, in whom all the security of the whole Florentine Republic lay, that very Lorenzo in whom the hope and goods of the people were placed; and everyone claimed that all of this was utterly appalling. From all the towns near the city, especially the nearest, a great number of armed men had already gathered in the squares, at crossroads, and above all around the Medici palace, to demonstrate their love for Lorenzo. Groups of citizens, with their children and followers, offered him their support and wealth, claiming that their safety, both public and private, depended only on him. [...] Lorenzo himself was not hindered in dealing with this affair by his wound, by fear, or by his terrible grief for the death of his brother. He hugged all citizens, [...] saying that his safety was due to all of them, and he showed himself at the window from time to time so that no one would be anxious about his condition. Thus all the people applauded him, raised their hands to the sky, gave thanks for his safety, and shouted with joy.]

This political outlook was one of the central pillars of Medici propaganda and it also appears in the famous medal that Lorenzo commissioned after the conspiracy from the artist Bertoldo di Giovanni, where Lorenzo's image is followed by the emblematic words 'salus publica', 'public safety', while, on the reverse, the image of his brother Giuliano is combined with the motto 'luctus publicus' ('public grief').<sup>48</sup> The pivotal concept of 'salus publica' emerged as the cornerstone of this ideological construction aimed at supporting the Medici government. It is not irrelevant that this idea is not just crucial in Poliziano's *Commentarium* (as the nucleus around which the whole passage quoted rotates), but is explicitly recalled also by the jurists, as Sozzini's words shows ('...cives primarii de salute patriae trepidabant...'; Corti 1558: 31v).

To conclude, this artwork is just a further *tessera* which has to be put alongside Poliziano's literary works, the *consilia* and the other texts to complete the multifaceted mosaic of Medici cultural politics after the conspiracy. This many-sided, consistent and effective system of propaganda shows once more the ramification of Lorenzo's all-encompassing political and cultural strategy, and, most importantly, the deep connection between all branches of this studied defence: a

<sup>47</sup> On this image of Lorenzo in the *Commentarium* see Celati 2015: 11-12, 21-22.

<sup>48</sup> On the medal see Langedijk 1981-1987: 27; Bullard 1994: 11.

defence that did not work through military means but through verbal weapons. More generally, juridical literature also reveals its key role in some crucial phases in Italian history, not just as a political or legal tool, but also as an important factor in the history of literature and culture.

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